TO:          HONORABLE CITY COUNCIL

FROM:        CITY MANAGER          DEPARTMENT: COMMUNITY SERVICES

DATE:       OCTOBER 20, 2008          CMR: 408:08

REPORTY TYPE: CONSENT

SUBJECT:        Parks and Recreation Commission Recommendation Adopting a Resolution Approving a Field Use Policy Applicable To Playing Fields in Palo Alto

RECOMMENDATION

Staff and the Parks and Recreation Commission (PARC) recommend that the City Council:
   1. Approve the attached Field Use Allocation Policy, and
   2. Adopt the attached resolution approving a Field Use Policy applicable to playing fields in Palo Alto.

BACKGROUND

The Recreation and Golf Division has worked closely with the Parks and Recreation Commission over the last six months to develop a formal “Field Use Allocation Policy” to ensure that park and field facilities are utilized for recreational, athletic, cultural, educational, social and community service functions that meet the needs and interests of the community. The City of Palo Alto Recreation and Golf Division brokers the use of all City and Palo Alto Unified School District (PAUSD) playing fields. These include fields at 16 parks, 5 sports complexes, 15 elementary schools, 3 middle schools and 2 high schools. The Division works regularly with 34 local sports clubs and non-profit organizations that represent approximately 25,000 sports participants. Athletic field space in Palo Alto, which is limited, continues to be in high demand. At the same time, the demand for fields for practice and competition continues to increase each year.

Existing informal field reservation guidelines are no longer adequate to address the demand for fields or for the competing interests of how often and to whom fields are brokered. There has never been a formal policy that establishes procedures and sets clear policies governing the use of City of Palo Alto and Palo Alto Unified School District playing fields managed by the City of Palo Alto. As the City continues to experience ever growing demand with limited supply of playing fields, the need for a clear, concise and objective field use policy has become evident.
The interests of many stakeholders were considered in the formulation of this policy draft including: various neighborhood residents, park maintenance staff, Field User Committee members, Parks & Recreation Commissioners, PAUSD, and regular field users. A Parks and Recreation Commission special study session was held on November 8, 2007, at Jordan Middle School to hear neighborhood and field user concerns about the use of the playing fields at Jordan Middle School. Public comment and feedback regarding the policy draft was solicited via email and the City’s website. Various neighboring cities were benchmarked from South San Francisco to San Jose to see what, if any, field use policy are currently in place. The proposed policy incorporates segments of the field use policies from the City of Campbell and the City of Cupertino, as these agencies appear to have the most comprehensive and effective policies of the various policies reviewed.

The policy provides the public and staff with fair and reasonable guidelines to broker City of Palo Alto and Palo Alto Unified School District fields. The policy: helps prioritize the high volume of field requests staff receives; it provides clear expectations of field users for turf preservation; and recognizes the impact on residents who live close to fields. The “Good Neighbor Guidelines” provide strategies that will hold field users accountable for excessive noise, litter and disregard of parking regulations. The Field Allocation Policy also addresses the appropriate type and amount of use that will be permitted on fields based on such criteria as: proximity to homes, field drainage, lights, restrooms and quality of turf.

The policy is unlikely to reduce field space allocation to regular field user groups but will provide clear policies and procedures for how staff determines field allocation amongst the many user groups.

BOARD/COMMISSION REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATION
At its August 26, 2008 regular meeting, the Parks and Recreation Commission discussed the first draft of the Field Use Allocation Policy and reviewed the public comments and suggestions received from various stakeholders regarding the draft policy. At its September 23, 2008 regular meeting, the Parks and Recreation Commission heard additional public comment, discussed further revisions, and unanimously voted to recommend the final draft (Attachment A) to Council for adoption.

RESOURCE IMPACT
The implementation of this policy will not result in a significant impact on staff time or resources.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS
The proposed policy is consistent with the Department of Community Services’ Strategic Plan and with current Park and Open Space Rules and Regulations.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW
The proposed policy is not subject to California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requirements.
ATTACHMENTS
Attachment A:   Field Use Policy
Attachment B:   Resolution Approving a Field Use Policy

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